

close by in Guilford Street, had formed an acquaintance with the family in Bloomsbury Square. It was Austen who, according to the very doubtful story, had found Benjamin reading Chaucer in chambers, and decided that he would never make a lawyer; and it was through Austen that Hyde House was taken by the Disraelis. Austen, as Ward's agent, had made the arrangements for the publication of *Tremaine*, and his young and clever wife was also in Ward's confidence, and had played a part in the negotiations. Aware, no doubt, of her relations with Colburn the publisher, Disraeli, who had no longer John Murray to apply to, turned to her for advice and assistance when his own novel was becoming ripe for publication. Sara Austen was well fitted to be the Egeria of a precocious youth of genius. 'She was a woman,' as her nephew Sir Henry Layard describes her, 'of more than ordinary talent and of more than ordinary beauty, very ambitious of shining in society and fond of flattery and admiration. Her accomplishments were many and various. She was a clever musician, a skilful artist, a good judge and critic of literary merit, and an excellent letter-writer. Had she chosen to be an authoress she would probably have been a successful one.'<sup>1</sup> Disraeli's earlier letters to her have unfortunately perished, but enough remain of Mrs. Austen's to help to elucidate our story.

*From Mrs. Austen.*

*Saturday Morning, 25th [Feb.\**

1826]. MY DEAR SIR,

Patience is not one of my virtues, as I fear you will discover to your cost, and I could just as easily sit without speaking till Tuesday as wait till then to give you my opinion

<sup>1</sup> Layard's *Autobiography*, I. p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> March 25 was also a Saturday, but as the book - was announced for publication at the beginning of April the earlier date must be chosen.